



The FA Master Gunner and Reset of the Redeployed FA Battalion

Never before in the history of the United States Army have Field Artillery units been called upon to perform as many diverse missions as they are today. As one of the most powerful branches in our Army, the FA is capable of dealing more precision destruction than at anytime in our history—FA units are executing these missions in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), now called War on Terrorism (WOT).

At the same time, the FA community has demonstrated its flexibility to perform almost any mission in WOT. FA units conduct humanitarian, military police, transportation and infantry missions, just to name a few, and conduct them with outstanding results. However, conducting these nonstandard missions in counterinsurgency operations in a cycle of unit deployment, reset and redeployment comes at a price to traditional FA core competencies.

As the training and management heart of our Artillery skill sets, FA NCOs *will* reset a unit with quality certification programs as mission and time allows—given the right support. The Master Gunner Division at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, has several initiatives to help our talented NCOs improve or reestablish FA certification programs in resetting units.

FA Master Gunner Division Initiatives. Our NCOs and unit master gunners and digital masters are more critical now than ever to reset a unit. A master gunner who is empowered by his battalion commander and CSM can build on or reestablish his unit's certification-qualification programs quickly if he has the knowledge and experience and has kept current on ongoing changes in the branch. The FA Master Gunner Division has a number of initiatives to help master gunners reset their units.

FA Certification and Qualification. The FA Master Gunner Division helps units

develop and implement FA certification and qualification programs using a coach-teach-mentor methodology. As an FA unit transitions from nonstandard missions to the skill sets needed for its primary Field Artillery role, recertification is a key component.

Currently, the division helps units reestablish their certification programs during unit visits. Units needing assistance contact the division's operations sergeant to coordinate dates and determine the unit's specific needs. Based on these needs, the division assembles the appropriate team to visit the unit.

While visiting the unit, the division's team mentors the NCO leadership to establish a certification plan in a three-day process. On Day One, the NCO-in-charge (NCOIC) of the certification team meets with the command team to determine the unit's mission and commander's guidance. Then the certification team meets with the unit's master gunner, digital master and operations sergeant to determine the unit's current level of FA proficiency as well as review its certification programs.

On Day Two, the team conducts workshops on FM 3-09.8 *Field Artillery Gunnery* with the master gunner, operations sergeant and artillery platoon sergeants. At the same time, the digital master and his NCOs participate in a workshop on Chapter 6, "Fire Direction Center (FDC)/Battery Operations Center (BOC)/Platoon Operations Center (POC)" of FM 3-09.8.

On the last day, unit personnel divide into working groups and the certification team facilitates the development of draft digital and cannon or multiple-launch rocket system (MLRS) certification programs. The team answers questions on everything from the new procedures for processing a fire mission on a Paladin to reloading operations for an M270A1



MLRS launcher to the newest software available on the advanced FA tactical data system (AFATDS). Finally, using the most up-to-date information, the team guides and mentors the master gunner and digital master into finalizing their certification-qualification programs that comply with current FA doctrine and the unit's mission and commander's guidance.

FA Master Gunner Home Page. Although units may email the division at famastergunner@conus.army.mil, the division also maintains communications with the field via its home page. The website is on the Fires Knowledge Network (FKN), part of Army Knowledge Online (AKO). On FKN, click on "Field Artillery Links" and scroll down to the "Field Artillery Center Quick Links" to find the "FA Master Gunner Division Home Page."

The home page not only has all the points of contact (POCs) for FA subject matter experts (SMEs), but also up-to-date examples of unit certification programs and standing operating procedures (SOPs) plus notification of FA changes to update the field. It has a real-time link for the field's questions that are posted and answered on a message board. A monthly newsletter is published on the home page to provide current information from the different departments and directorates of the Fires Center of Excellence at Fort Sill as well as unit stories sharing innovative ideas and procedures.

FA Master Gunner and Digital Master Course. The division supports this two-week course, which is conducted once

a quarter at the Fort Sill NCO Academy (NCOA). As a pilot, the October 2006 course included two days of relevant training for unit digital masters. Future courses will continue to train not only 13B Cannon Crewmember and 13M MLRS Crewmember master gunners, but also 13P MLRS System Operations/Fire Direction Specialist and 13D FA Tactical Data Systems Specialist senior fire direction NCOs.

The course teaches current doctrine, training management, crew-served weapons and small arms, Artillery weapon-specific tracks and fire direction operations to help master gunners and digital masters implement their unit's training and certification programs.

The FA Master Gunner and Digital Master Course start dates for 2007 are 29 January to 9 February, 11 to 22 June, and 10 to 21 September. Master Gunners and digital masters sign up for the course via the Army training requirements and resources system (ATRRS). If master

gunners or digital masters have questions about the course, they can email the division at famastergunner@conus.army.mil.

Other Future Initiatives. The way ahead for the FA Master Gunner Division is fluid as it changes with the needs of the field; however, it is focusing on three specific areas. First, the division is updating the Master Gunner and Digital Master Course, based on feedback from the field and current WOT tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs). This updating includes developing a one-week additional skill identifier- (ASI)-producing digital master track within the Master Gunner Course.

Second, the division is steadily collecting and posting small-arms specific data on the FA Master Gunner Home Page. Units projected to deploy in WOT should access the data.

Last, the division is finalizing and then will update a database of all master gunners and digital masters in our ac-

tive and Army national guard (ARNG) units. The database and feedback from the field is critical as it will facilitate the division's tracking the needs of the FA community.

Ongoing initiatives in the FA NCOA include building programs of instruction (POIs) to help "reset" NCOs who attend the advanced and basic NCO courses (ANCOC and BNCOC). The new POIs will "recertify" NCOs by adding hands-on training that culminates with a live-fire exercise. The new NCOA training could be implemented as early as the Second Quarter of FY07.

Continue Gaining Field Feedback for Initiatives. The FA Master Gunner Division will continue to query units on what they need to recertify and qualify in FA skill sets and what improvements it can make to existing initiatives. Unfortunately, many units will perform back-to-back nonstandard missions and won't have time to reset when they return from Central Command (CENTCOM). Regardless, the division and FA Center will "lean forward" now to get the resources needed to help resetting FA command teams.

Advice from the FA CSM. I want to stress the importance of selecting the right NCO to be the unit master gunner and then empowering him to serve as the unit's training and certification "combat multiplier." And I would advise commanders that the most senior cannon or MLRS sergeant first class (SFC) is *not necessarily* the right choice for master gunner. The right NCO is someone who is not only technically competent, but also has the intestinal fortitude to ruthlessly enforce a *quality* certification program—the bedrock of his Soldiers' competence as Artillerymen. In my letter to promotion boards explaining the responsibilities of a master gunner, I describe him as one of the best and most competent NCOs in FA units, an NCO who is hand-picked by the CSM.

I recommend the battalion CSM rate the master gunner and the battalion S3 senior rate him with the battalion commander reviewing the efficiency report. This rating chain sends a clear signal about the master gunner's importance in the unit.

However, the master gunner rating scheme or other initiatives may not be "cookie cutters" for the digital master. We will implement initiatives to most effectively train and develop the digital master.

As a branch, we will continue to face

FA Master Gunner Division

In October of 2005, the Chief of Field Artillery established the FA Master Gunner Division to help train master gunners and help FA units maintain their Artillery proficiency through the turbulent times of transforming the force and supporting the War on Terrorism (WOT). The division's mission statement is "to conduct visits with Active and Reserve Component units throughout the Artillery community; to assist units in transformation develop unit certification/qualification programs, to serve as an informational portal and to receive feedback from the field." Its mission now also supports unit digital masters.

Further, the division serves as the key staff section to advise the Chief of Field Artillery, FA Command Sergeant Major (CSM), Assistant Commandant (AC), Director of the Directorate of Training and Doctrine (DOTD) and Commander of the 428th Field Artillery Brigade (formerly the 30th FA Regiment) in the FA School on all matters affecting master gunner and digital master programs. To meet the needs of the field, the division is

staffed by a number of senior NCOs who are subject matter experts (SMEs) from various military occupational specialties (MOS) in the FA branch. One advantage of being at Fort Sill is the FA Master Gunner Division stays abreast of the most up-to-date information and rapidly can pass FA changes on to the field.

The FA Master Gunner Division is under the 428th Field Artillery Brigade in the FA School. The division's email is famastergunner@conus.army.mil. Master Sergeant Robert A. Niebauer is the FA Master Gunner and can be emailed at robert.niebauer@us.army.mil or called at the 24-hour Redleg Hotline at DSN 639-4089 or commercial 580-442-4089. The division also posts answers to questions on a message board on its home page on the Fires Knowledge Network (FKN) on Army Knowledge Online (AKO), among other online support programs.

The FA Master Gunner Division stands ready to provide units training and assistance to improve or rebuild their FA skill sets.

challenges in maintaining our core skills as our units conduct nonstandard missions in a succession of deployments in WOT. As some of the most lethal and flexible warriors on the battlefield today, Field Artillerymen demonstrate daily that they are Army “Pentathletes”—able to adapt and adapt very quickly

The FA Master Gunner Division and the Fires Center of Excellence will support redeployed units as they rebuild their FA core competencies, maintaining their Pentathlete adaptability to execute lethal as well as nonlethal missions.

Command Sergeant Major (CSM) William E. High, Jr., has been the CSM of the Field Artillery at the Fires Center of Excellence, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, since May 2005. He has performed in every leadership position from Section Chief of a Lance Missile Section to Multiple-Launch Rocket System (MLRS) Platoon Sergeant to First Sergeant of five batteries to CSM of a battalion and division artillery. He was the First Sergeant of line MLRS and M119 batteries, an MLRS separate battery, the Headquarters and Headquarters Battery of the 1st Infantry Division Artillery in Germany and Headquarters and Service Battery of 3rd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment (3-319 AFAR) in the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg,



Photo by Fred W. Baker III

Students in the Field Artillery Master Gunner Course are helped by course instructor Lawrence Streeter (center) while disassembling the MK19 grenade machine gun.

North Carolina. He was the CSM of 2-320 FA and the 101st Airborne Division Artillery at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and while deployed for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) I. Among other assignments, he served as a Drill Sergeant and S2 Operations NCO-in-Charge.

The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions to this column of the Master Gunner Division, part of the 428th Field Artillery Brigade, Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

30th FA Regiment Redesignated the 428th FA Brigade

On 7 December 2006, the Field Artillery School's 30th FA Regiment became the 428th FA Brigade during a ceremony at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The reviewing officer was Assistant Commandant Colonel Albert Johnson, Jr. The redesignation was part of the Training and Doctrine Command's (TRADOC's) move to the brigade structure in all its schools. The 30th FA Regiment had served the FA School since 1 February 1989.

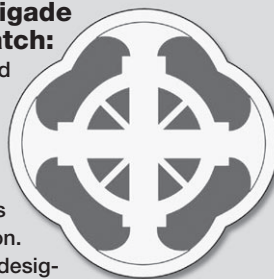
The 428th FA Brigade retains the same mission as the 30th FA Regiment. The 428th's motto is *First, or Not at All*. Soldiers and leaders on the brigade staff and in the Master Gunner Division and maintenance shop will wear the 428th's shoulder patch. The Directorate of Training and Doctrine (DOTD), Futures Development and Integration Center (FDIC), Joint and Combined Integration Department (JACI), commanding general's staff and post support agencies will continue to wear the schoolhouse patch.



428th FA Brigade Shoulder Patch:

The scarlet and gold patch has a wheel with a cross through the center, simulating the muzzles of guns in action.

The numerical designation of the brigade is indicated by the quatrefoil (4), two colors (2) and eight segments between the spokes of the wheel and cross (8).



On the left, COL Kevin M. Batule, Commander of the new 428th FA Brigade, stands with the brigade's new flag while CSM Gary W. Bess on the right stands with the 30th FA Regiment's flag. The 428th's crest is scarlet and gold with three “bomb bursts” symbolizing the unit's three Italian campaigns in World War II: Roma-Arno, North Apennines and Po Valley. (Photo by CW4(R) Terry G. Melvin, S4, 428th FA Brigade)